

Resuming Studio Instruction During COVID-19

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Resuming Studio Instruction During COVID-19 (2020). Official resource of the American String Teachers Association.

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Abstract:

The American String Teachers Association convened the ASTA COVID-19 Task Force on May 21, 2020, to create a planning resource for string teachers as they prepare to resume string instruction in classrooms and studios in the fall. The following document contains suggestions for private studio teaching (or applied instruction) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 varies by state and community, so planning must take place within the guidelines determined by state and local officials. ASTA does not claim medical, legal, or scientific expertise; rather, we have summarized the current research available to assist teachers' planning efforts for fall. Research is ongoing and our understanding of the current situation will continue to evolve. This resource is a living document and will continue to be updated by ASTA. Student and teacher safety should remain a priority, and we highly encourage teachers to stay informed and follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), federal, state, and local guidelines for health and safety.

Keywords: American String Teachers Association | COVID-19 | music education | string instruction

Article:

*****Note: Full text of article below**

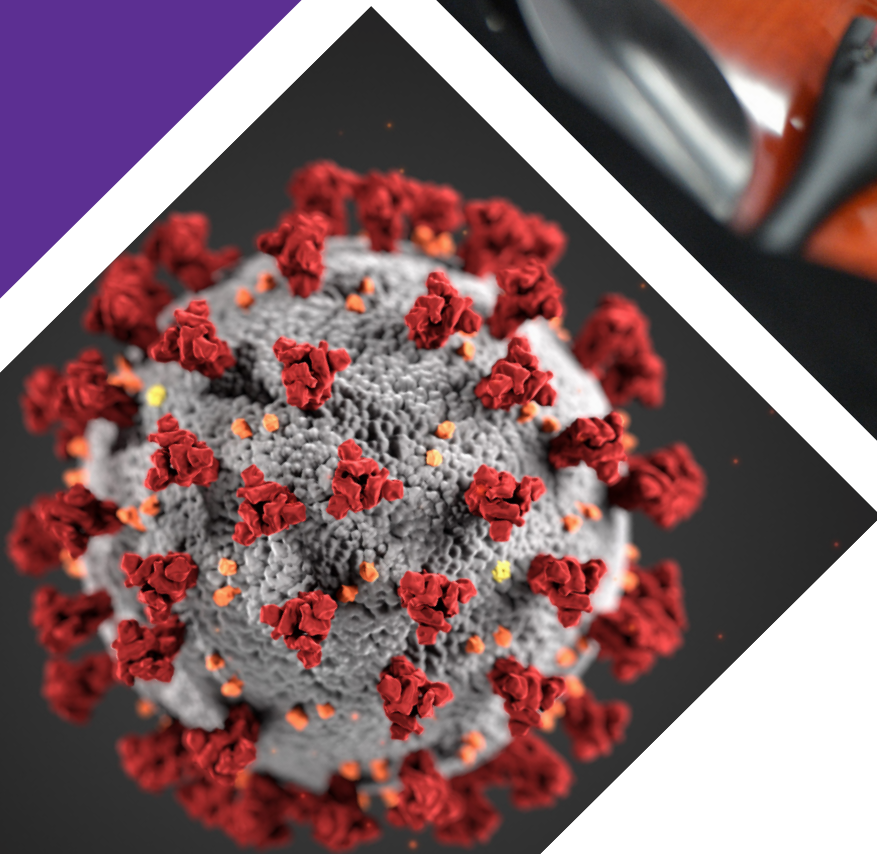
Resuming Studio Instruction During COVID-19

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Version 1
July 1, 2020



 | **ASTA**
American String Teachers Association

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is meant to offer general
suggestions to help you in the
studio. Always follow local, state,
and federal laws and guidelines.

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INTRODUCTION

The American String Teachers Association convened the ASTA COVID-19 Task Force on May 21, 2020, to create a planning resource for string teachers as they prepare to resume string instruction in classrooms and studios in the fall. The following document contains suggestions for private studio teaching (or applied instruction) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 varies by state and community, so planning must take place within the guidelines determined by state and local officials. ASTA does not claim medical, legal, or scientific expertise; rather, we have summarized the current research available to assist teachers' planning efforts for fall. Research is ongoing and our understanding of the current situation will continue to evolve. This resource is a living document and will continue to be updated by ASTA. Student and teacher safety should remain a priority, and we highly encourage teachers to stay informed and follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), federal, state, and local guidelines for health and safety.

ONGOING COLLABORATIONS

ASTA is committed to working with other arts organizations as we navigate our new reality. To that end, ASTA has partnered with a number of music organizations.

Arts Education Is Essential

ASTA was among 53 arts organizations to support and sign the joint [Arts Education Is Essential](#) statement in May 2020. The statement endorses arts education as an important subject to be included in every child's education. The opening statement reads: "It is imperative that all students have access to an equitable delivery of arts education that includes dance, media arts, music, theatre, and

visual arts that supports their educational, social, and emotional well-being, taught by certified professional arts educators in partnership with community arts providers." ASTA affirms that:

- Arts education supports the social and emotional well-being of students, whether through distance learning or in person.
- Arts education nurtures the creation of a welcoming school environment where students can express themselves in a safe and positive way.
- Arts education is part of a well-rounded education for all students as understood and supported by federal and state policymakers.

International Coalition of Performing Arts Organizations Commission COVID-19 Research

ASTA has joined with over 100 arts organizations in support of ongoing research to investigate aerosol rates produced by wind instrumentalists and vocalists. This [commissioned COVID-19 study](#) is being led by Dr. Shelly Miller, Professor of Mechanical Engineering and faculty in Environmental Engineering at the University of Colorado Boulder. Dr. Miller is an expert on indoor environmental air quality including airborne infectious disease transmission and control, as well as air cleaning technologies. This report, along with others, will help inform our ability to reduce risk in collaborative rehearsal environments that include wind players and vocalists.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Determine lesson delivery

When determining your preferred method of lesson delivery, consider the following:

- Is it possible to maintain a 6-foot social distance while teaching?
 - Examine the room used for teaching, measure spacing, and mark area with tape or signage.
 - Consider teaching outside.
 - Providing extra protection with the use of an acrylic partition is an additional precautionary measure that may help.
- Does the studio space have access to fresh air to adequately ventilate the space each hour (windows/doors open) and/or is there an HVAC system control?
 - Locate the air supply vents and return air vents, as well as noting the direction of the air flow. When possible, arrange students perpendicular to the air flow in the room. For example, if the air flow supply-to-return flows north to south, arrange students in an east to west formation (Feng et al. 2020).
- Do students have access to the technology required to benefit from online instruction?
- Is there support at home to help students manage online instruction?
 - If not, create a mode of delivery that will facilitate student involvement and keep them engaged.
- Is it possible to meet a range of delivery needs depending on each students' unique health and socio-economic requirements and the teacher's own level of acceptable personal risk?
- Are you an employee of a music school or business?
 - Approach your administrators now about clarifying safety policies and procedures, as well as identifying materials needed to support health regulations and effective teaching.

Communicate

Establish a clear and consistent line of communication with students/guardians, whether through email or your website.

- Provide regularly scheduled updates.
- Consider having students/guardians sign a responsibility agreement, detailing disinfecting procedures (if applicable) and self-screening requirements to attend lessons.
- Review lesson attendance requirements and cancellation arrangements. Consider alterations to support student health and to be responsive to challenges faced by families.
- If using a hybrid mode of instruction, find ways to ensure that students stay up to date with scheduling, delivery modes, and assignments. Investigate using online shared documents and calendars, as well as weekly announcements, to facilitate communication.
- Create a document that outlines all policies and procedures for lessons during this time and distribute to students/guardians.

Equity and access must receive consideration

The disruption created by COVID-19 has brought to the surface additional issues related to equity and access. Be mindful of the resources available to *all of your students*. Some students may lack access to technology, internet, or an instrument; other students may be immunocompromised. There are many factors to consider so that students' needs are met. Increased *two-way communication* between teachers, students, and families is essential to maintaining engagement as teachers navigate face-to-face, online, and hybrid instruction.

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Before returning to in-person lessons, outline the disinfecting and safety precautions for the studio that will be implemented and communicate these guidelines with students/guardians. Check CDC, federal, state, and local guidelines for small businesses.

- Consider wearing a mask and/or face shield and require masks for student(s) and guardian(s) (Texas A & M University 2020).
- Students should use hand sanitizer or wash their hands with soap and water prior to and after the lesson.
- Instruct students/guardians about how to safely clean their instruments and encourage them to do so prior to lessons. Refer to the [Instrument Cleaning Tips](#) on the ASTA website for up-to-date information about instrument cleaning during COVID-19.
- Consider using health-screening forms as a way to reduce risk for students and teachers.
 - Health-screening forms may be presented to students online as a fillable form the same day as their lesson, prior to their arrival at the studio.
 - Ask if the student has experienced any of the symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and if they have been in contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19.
 - Ask guardians to certify that the student does not have a fever.
 - Teachers may consider screening students' temperature upon arrival at the lesson. For health privacy reasons, be sure to refer to the [CDC guidelines for small businesses](#).
- Minimize materials students bring into the teaching space.
 - Designate a single space where students will leave their personal items during the lesson to simplify the disinfection process between lessons.
 - Consider having students bring their own music stand.
- Encourage students to record lessons.
 - Teachers might not be able to mark in the student's music due to the social distancing requirement; recording the lesson ensures that nothing is missed and allows student to review the lesson throughout the week.

Please note: It is encouraged that studio classes/group lessons should move online if a large enough space to maintain social distancing requirements is not available. Remember to review [CDC](#), state, and local guidelines on gatherings to ensure alignment with local requirements.

- If using a larger space, consider how students will enter and exit to avoid close contact.
- Chamber music ensembles can be reduced to smaller ensembles based on available space and/or use a hybrid rehearsal/coaching method (BSQ 2020).

For shared instructional space: If you are teaching private lessons at a public school or other public space, consult with program/building administrators to ensure that you are in compliance with all COVID-related safety regulations and schedule alterations.

- If there is shared teaching space with others, start a conversation now to clarify safety procedures and scheduling arrangements and to identify required materials.

Teaching space

Set a schedule for disinfecting the teaching space and any area that students/guardians might have contacted (CDC 2020). Check CDC guidelines for disinfection requirements.

- Add a window of time between lessons to disinfect and to reduce the number of people coming into contact with each other.
- Use EPA-approved cleaning products (EPA 2020).
- Disinfect music stands, doorknobs, tables, chairs and any other high-touch surfaces in the teaching space between lessons. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the elimination of high-touch surfaces over frequent cleaning. If it is not possible to leave classroom doors open, plan to disinfect doors and handles regularly (AAP 2020).
- If using a piano, include it in your disinfecting routine (Cheng 2020).
- Ventilate the room during the time between lessons by opening windows and doors, if they are not already open (Allen 2020).

Waiting areas

Examine your waiting areas: position chairs to ensure adequate social distancing.

- Remove all extraneous items from the waiting room that might be difficult to disinfect regularly, such as toys and magazines (Gilligan 2020).

- Consider eliminating waiting areas.

- Develop a system to notify students when you are ready for them to enter the teaching space, for example, via text or prior arrangement.
- Encourage guardians to wait in the car for their students during lessons.
- In considering whether siblings can attend lessons, examine the teaching space to evaluate if it is large enough for distancing to be maintained throughout the lesson and if the sibling is old enough to comply with your safety requirements. If you institute a health screening policy, the health status of anyone attending the lesson with the student should be included.

Shared items

- Eliminate shared items between students/guardians and yourself. These include pencils, rosin, metronome, tuner, sheet music, etc.

Consider alternative schedules

- For students who take hour-long lessons, consider meeting for 30 minutes twice a week to reduce the length of time in contact.
- Consider a hybrid approach, keeping groups of students consistent in their membership. Alternate between seeing groups of students in person versus online.
- Keep your schedule consistent as much as possible so that the same students are using the studio on the same day, each week.

POSSIBLE MATERIALS NEEDED

- Disinfecting agents
 - Wipes, sprays, instrument-specific cleaning agents (EPA 2020; NAFME 2020)
- Shields/curtains
 - Many shields are available and can be found online.
 - Instructions on how to make a [drum shield](#)
- Mask or face shield
 - Have extra single-use masks on hand for students/guardians.
- Thermometer
 - Check CDC and local guidelines to ensure proper administration of any checks.
- Hand sanitizer
- Portable air purifier
- Lapel microphone or voice amplification
 - If speaking to a group in a larger space while wearing a mask, consider using a lapel mic or other means of voice amplification to reduce the need to speak loudly for long periods of time (Patel 2020).
- Signage
 - Denote single entry and exit points, where the student will stand, and where the student will place their case.
 - Mark spaces for students on the floor with tape (5.48-foot square or 6.18-foot wide circle—30 square-foot model).
 - Consider posting reminders about policies and procedures in the waiting room and/or teaching space.
- Music Stands
 - Use your own stand and designate another stand just for the student or encourage students to bring their own.

VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION

STUDENT SAFETY

Studio teachers should follow all federal, state, and local laws concerning privacy, minors, and online education. Make sure to review studio practices. It is recommended that you consult legal advice to ensure the alignment of the studio with privacy and other laws.

Some considerations include:

- [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act](#) (1998) (FTC 2020).
- [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA).
- Social media
 - Consider consulting legal counsel when creating release forms.
 - Obtain a media release (TpT 2020) from your students' guardians prior to posting any content that identifies or depicts students.
- Recording student lessons: obtain written permission from the guardian and specify the following (ISM 2020):
 - Purpose of the recordings (for the student's education)
 - Storage procedures for the recordings
 - Sharing policies (to be shared only with the student and their guardian(s))
 - Deletion of recordings (schedule, method). Alternately, guardians could record the lesson from their account. If so, discuss guidelines about sharing, storing, and deleting content.
- Professional video conferencing account: Consider setting up a separate account to use only for teaching. Clarify with guardians that you will use the conferencing account with their students only for lessons (ISM 2020).
- Visible teaching space: Ensure that all items visible on-screen during lessons support your professional demeanor and standards.
 - Remove any potentially offensive or highly personal items.
 - Gather all necessary items within reach of your teaching space prior to lessons.
 - Clarify that students must also dress and behave in a professional manner and that a lesson will be terminated if this is violated.
 - Consider requiring students to keep the door of their room open during lessons or have a guardian present.
- Clear expectations and guidelines for guardians: Establish the level of participation you expect from guardians during lessons; include this in any initial communication.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

How to connect

Create a document that details preferred video conferencing applications, as well as any technical specifications that will be necessary for online instruction.

- Specify how the student should set up their camera and adjust audio settings to maximize clarity during lessons (Heidbreder 2020).
- Consider scheduling a short meeting prior to the first lesson to ensure that the student has the best possible set-up (audio and visual).

- Recommend a camera angle from above violin students, with students standing parallel to the camera. Their entire upper body (including the entire range of motion required to travel from tip to frog), their left hand (in all playing positions), and their contact point on the string must all be visible. Cello and bass students may need to set the camera height lower or farther away to include a view of both left and right hands in all playing positions.
- Suggest that students consider using equipment such as an external USB microphone to increase the quality of sound.
- Encourage students to find a relatively quiet, well-lit location for their online lesson.
Note: The closer they are to the WIFI router, the better the video/audio quality.
- Make a list of all the materials students should have with them during their lesson, which could include a metronome and tuner.
- Clarify for students/guardians how you will secure the video conferencing “room” during lessons (Shaw 2020).
- Suggest that students/guardians send pictures or a PDF of the music the student will play in their lesson prior to the scheduled lesson time.

Lessons

Be prepared to shorten your lesson times during online delivery, as many students find focusing for their usual lesson time more difficult when not in person.

- Consider meeting for shorter times, more frequently.
- Consider meeting online for half of the usual lesson time and having students submit videos and/or recordings for review during the week.
- Build time into teaching schedules for breaks to combat online fatigue for instructor(s) (Sklar 2020).

Additional media content suggestions

Consider creating or referencing additional media content for your students and families to use during the week as reference.

- Send pictures of various elements of string technique (bow hold, bow alignment, left hand position, etc.).
- Create or reference short how-to videos related to practicing, tuning, or any topic that might support the work being done in lessons.
- Investigate using an external camera that might allow for more variety in angles when demonstrating various techniques during lessons or in videos.

Other ways to engage the student

Employ strategies to foster community and strengthen engagement (also see [Student Engagement](#)).

- Encourage students to set weekly goals and reflect on their efforts. Create a fillable online form for students to complete each week so you can understand how they are coping during this time.
- Shared online documents can substitute for lesson notebooks and provide a way to communicate during and between lessons.
- Use discussion board or blog applications to keep students connected and collaborating virtually.

Considerations for beginning students online

- Explain to guardians and students that the process for beginning a string instrument online will require some patience and a bit more time than traditional in-person, hands-on, weekly lessons. The guardian will need to be very involved in the process, so this may be a great time for some and a difficult time for others to start a string instrument.
- Consider raising the beginning age to 6 or 7, as it can be difficult for younger students to interpret what you are doing over a screen.
- Have guardians drop off the instrument so that it can be set up with tapes, pinky houses, sponges, and a comfortable chin rest for violin/viola before guardians take it home.
- Set up a time to teach the guardian how to tune the instrument on their own outside of lesson.
- Require guardians to be present for the entire lesson to help with technical issues and to be your assistant with instrument and body positioning.
- Send videos before the lesson and refer to them during the lesson to help the guardian understand what is being taught in the lesson to repeat with the student at home. Consult existing online resources for support.
- If possible, safe, and permissible by federal, state, and local guidelines, a hybrid approach with some online and some in-person instruction is suggested for a beginning student.

ONLINE EQUIPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

A few considerations for virtual instruction materials include:

- External microphone
- Headphones (semi-open)
- Video conferencing application
- Tripod (for phone, if using as main video source)
- External video camera (if not using phone/PC/MAC or if additional angle is needed)
- PDF editor application (for marking scores)

HYBRID INSTRUCTION

Alternate delivery schedules

- **50/50:** Students receive a shortened in-person lesson each week to minimize exposure time; the other half of the usual lesson time can be delivered via video conferencing or by providing feedback about uploaded videos.
- **A/B:** Students are divided into two groups (A/B); one week, students in group A receive in-person instruction while students in group B receive online instruction, alternating delivery methods from week to week thereafter.
- **50/Feedback:** Students receive a shortened in-person lesson each week (50 percent of their usual time) and submit a video of their playing for review. Teachers can assign specific material for the video as well as encourage students to ask questions or make comments about their work that week. In response, the teacher can record comments, mark up a PDF of the student's music, submit detailed written comments, and/or have a brief video conference to discuss the recording.
- **Studio classes/Technique classes:** Group instruction can be delivered via video conferencing. Consider assigning solo repertoire or pieces that do not require extensive accompaniment for studio class performances. Consider dividing students into smaller groups to allow students more individualized instruction and opportunities to perform. Depending on the severity of the outbreak in your area and space available, group instruction could use an A/B scheduling approach to incorporate some in-person delivery. Be sure to consider the size of your teaching space if doing any group instruction in person: Review CDC, federal, state and local guidelines including social distancing, mask, ventilation and other requirements.
- **Video submissions:** To supplement lesson instruction, consider having students submit weekly videos for review. Instructors can provide comments via brief videos, through written comments, or by marking directly on PDF scores that can be emailed back to the student.
- **Guest artist studio swaps:** To supplement ongoing instruction with your students, reach out to colleagues to arrange studio class/technique class exchanges, delivered remotely via video conferencing.

Considerations for beginning students in a hybrid format

Any of the guidance provided in the [Considerations for beginning students online](#) section of this document could be adapted to a hybrid teaching scenario. A high level of guardian involvement will be necessary, regardless of delivery method.

GENERAL INFORMATION (ALL DELIVERY METHODS)

PERFORMANCES

Students need periodic performance goals to help keep them motivated and engaged in the artistry of playing their instrument. Consider setting up regular opportunities for them to practice performing, to experience playing for a community, to aim for completion of repertoire, and to receive constructive feedback. If possible, involve the students in setting their goals, selecting their repertoire, and choosing their performance format. Empowering students to develop a sense of autonomy will help foster intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000).

Suggested repertoire considerations

Explore repertoire that does not need accompaniment or that can stand alone without sacrificing artistic content. Show pieces and some concerti may work better than duo sonatas if using an accompaniment is not possible.

Consider using available accompaniment applications or recordings. Alternately, pianists can record their part for student use, but they should plan on including a lead-in counting cue and/or arranging the score to facilitate ensemble (for example, adding chords in rests or using a click track). Pieces with less rubato will work more easily in this format.

If students are able to rehearse in person with a pianist, consider selecting literature that does not require excessive amounts of rehearsal.

Performance formats (depending on regional policies)

- **Live:** reduce the number of audience members and adhere to all CDC guidelines, and federal, state, and local requirements regarding safety and social distancing.

- **Recorded:** use pre-recorded accompaniment; student performs solo or with an accompanist who agrees to in-person collaboration; share performances via audio/video file or upload to online video sharing website. Ensure adherence to all privacy requirements.
- **Video streaming:** use pre-recorded accompaniment; student performs solo or with an accompanist who agrees to in-person collaboration; share performances live via video conferencing or social media application. Ensure adherence to all privacy requirements.
- **Hybrid:** reduce the number of in-person audience members while streaming or recording the performance.

Ideas for assessments

Students can create video portfolios in lieu of live assessments. To mimic a live performance, students can be instructed to perform all works in a single take. Alternately, students can assemble a portfolio of their best takes that might be of use for future applications or auditions. If students have access to supportive technology (external microphone) and adequate WIFI, live streaming is a possible substitute for an in-person performance.

Consider enrolling your students in an established certification program, such as the [ASTA Certificate Advancement Program](#). Additionally, look for opportunities to submit recordings for evaluation or competition consideration for programs that might have moved online for the duration of the pandemic. Local and regional music organizations and schools might offer remote iterations of their annual solo and ensemble competitions, or opportunities for students to be evaluated.

WELLNESS CONSIDERATIONS

Teaching in any of the aforementioned formats may be taxing on the teacher. Challenges range from keeping track of a varied schedule, to teaching online instead of in person and the subsequent reduced human interaction, to experiencing the physical and emotional toll of wearing a mask for extended periods of time. In-person teaching still requires social distancing and limits the “hands-on” approach that so many teachers use in lessons. Teachers will need to change the way they communicate with guardians and students in order to address alternative assignments, technology, and independent learning. These adjustments could pose challenges to a teacher’s established teaching style. In order to sustain optimal health and resilience, please consider ways to support your general wellness.

Recommendations

Build time into your schedule to reset physically and mentally between lessons, especially if teaching online.

- Spend time outside or find a way to have fresh air and sunlight in your teaching space.
- Vary your position: stand to teach or use your breaks between lessons to move and/or stretch.
- Keep hydrated.
- Time between in-person lessons will be used for disinfecting. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Children should not be present when disinfectants are in use and should not participate in disinfecting activities. Most of these products are not safe for use by children, whose ‘hand-to-mouth’ behaviors and frequent touching of their face and eyes put them at higher risk for toxic exposures” (AAP 2020).
- Resist using the time between lessons to multitask. Try to step away from all screens for a brief break, if possible.

Aim for optimal ergonomics in your computer set-up, if teaching online (UHS 2020).

- Choose a supportive chair.
- Be sure that the height of your monitor aligns with your natural line of sight.
- If you are using other paper materials (scores, books) while teaching online, try to align them with your line of sight, perhaps placing them on a music stand to the side of your computer.
- Sit at arm’s length to your computer screen.
- Be aware of your body alignment while working.
- For every 20 minutes you look at your computer screen, try to look at a distant object (20 feet away) for 20 seconds to reduce eye strain (Cleveland Clinic 2020).

Define clear boundaries in your schedule between work and personal time.

- If possible, use a separate space designated only for work.
- Find ways to minimize screen time when not working.
- Communicate with students (and colleagues) when you are available to answer emails and when they might expect a delayed response.
- Set “office hours” if teaching online.
- Build in transition time at the start and end of your workday.

Give yourself a break.

- All of this is new territory, from using new technology to altering your teaching style. Realize that you are not alone in this discomfort and it is okay to feel this way. Check in with yourself throughout your day. How are you feeling and what do you need? Who could you ask for help or support? Spending time taking care of yourself helps build your resilience and deepens your connection to others (Neff and McGehee 2010).
- Examine your expectations during this time. Do they align with your priorities?

- Realize that everyone is operating under less-than-ideal circumstances.
- Investigate self-compassion exercises.

Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to affect the psychological processes involved in self-regulation, attention, and executive function; taking care reduces stress among teachers and students (Diaz, Silveira, and Strand 2020).

- Consider incorporating a mindfulness-based practice into your daily routine.
 - 4-7-8 Breathing
 - Breath awareness exercise
 - Body scan
 - STOP or RAIN exercises
 - Metta meditation
- Encourage students to incorporate a basic breath awareness exercises into their practice routine (Winston 2020).
 - Breath awareness has been shown to affect the cognitive processes involved in the regulation of emotions (Guendelman, Medeiros, and Rampes 2017).
 - Use this practice at the start of lessons or as a pre-performance strategy.
- Model curiosity during instruction, encouraging students to notice and describe rather than judge.
- Ask your students how they are feeling. Listen, don't fix.
- If you notice a marked change in your student's behavior, speak up and reach out for help.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Provide opportunities for students to interact with others.

- Establish a buddy system for students.
 - Pair students to serve as small co-mentor groups, encouraging them to meet via video conferencing during the week to collaborate on a project or just to check in with each other.
- Find a local charity to support and create a studio video to post on social media to raise funds and/or awareness for that cause.
- Set up a studio Facebook group, Instagram, or Twitter account.
 - Send out reminders, studio information, or fun challenges ("LIKE if you practiced today").
 - Share inspiring videos and interesting articles.
 - Be sure to notify guardians of your account and clarify its purpose, allowing families to choose whether or not to participate.
 - Follow guidelines pertaining to student privacy, obtaining media releases from guardians if using content including students on social media (TpT 2020).
- Start a studio practice challenge and encourage students to share weekly videos via the medium of your choice.

Emphasize teaching your students how to practice in order to build their sense of autonomy and competence, which will positively affect their motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000).

- Focus on one practice technique a week as a special topic.
- Consider giving online workshops about practicing so that the guardians can attend.
- Clarify goals and expectations with guardians/students. Provide resources for guardians and communicate frequently to ensure that they feel supported in assisting their students.

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